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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUCHAREST 000188

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STATE FOR EUR/CE A.SCHEIBE
OSD/ISA FOR D. ROH

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TAGS: MARR MOPS MCAP PREL PGOV IZ AF RO
SUBJECT: ROMANIAN DEFENSE MINISTRY ON DEPLOYMENTS,
PRIORITYES AND REQUESTS

Classified By: Charge D'Affaires, i.a. Jeri Guthrie-Corn; Reasons 1.4 (a), (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During a meeting with Ministry of National Defense officials, the Director General for Defense Policy discussed current thinking regarding Romania's participation in its overseas deployments, reassuring the U.S. on continuity of operations. He also raised the option of providing access to other partners to use the facilities under Joint Task Force-East for training and exercises. Finally, he requested a joint State-DOD team briefing for GOR officials on Missile Defense. The GOR has some hard choices to make on the continuation of its military modernization plan in light of a new assessment of national security interests and the impact of the financial crisis. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) This is a request for guidance; See paragraph 9.

¶3. (C) During informal political-military discussions at the Ministry of National Defense (MND) on March 12, Director General for Defense Policy Dragos Ghercioiu reiterated GOR policy that Romania would maintain a "continuous presence" in Iraq as long as it is required; Romania is committed to fulfill its commitments to the U.S. That said, Ghercioiu noted that the GOR is still waiting for signals from the Iraqis on what expectations there may be for Romania once the terms of the current agreement end after July 2009. He said MND is hoping the visit of the Iraqi Defense Minister to Bucharest--possibly before the end of March--may signal Iraq's expectations. Meanwhile, MND is still waiting on details regarding the NTM-I mission. Nonetheless, Ghercioiu noted that Romania understands the Iraqis do not anticipate Romania changing its current mission profile focused on training and support. (Romania currently has 367 troops in Iraq; three are assigned to NTM-I). Under the Exchange of Letters between Romania and Iraq, Romania provides humanitarian support, convoy security related to the humanitarian assistance, Staff Officers for mentoring and training Iraqi Security Forces, training for area reconnaissance, and facility protection.

¶4. (C) On Afghanistan, Ghercioiu expressed concern that the Ministry of Interior is resisting MND entreaties for Gendarmes to contribute to law enforcement requirements in Afghanistan where the EU committed to help build the national police capacity through a civilian ESDP mission. Ghercioiu was clear that the military has reached its maximum with 1,000 troops; we heard the same message from the MFA. Any subsequent contributions to the operations in Afghanistan must come from the civilian side. According to Ghercioiu, MND's assessment is that Romanian Gendarmes would make a

positive contribution to the Romanian military mission by alleviating it from some of the force protection issues; gendarmes would perform as a "gap filler," but the Interior Ministry is not inclined to provide the support. He suggested the U.S. Embassy appeal directly to the Interior Minister and possibly raise the issue with the Presidency or National Security Advisor Fota in Cotroceni. This is an important priority for MND, Ghercioiu underscored. (Note: Charge and Polcouns subsequently raised the issue directly with Interior Minister Nica, who responded that his ministry was itself confronting draconian budget cuts this year. Nica said that a ministry that was having difficulties in meeting basic police payrolls was scarcely in a position to consider deploying a portion of its forces overseas in the near future. End Note)

15. (C) Along the same vein, Ghercioiu said Defense Minister Stanisoara and Defense Policy State Secretary Oancea have agreed to focus procurement priorities on enhancing force protection for deployed troops. While MND was waiting for final FMF 2009 figures, Romania is seriously considering Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles. He also noted that an expert group was formed to consult with the General Staff to consider how best to address NATO helicopter requirements in Afghanistan. The group is examining ways to access the proposed UK-French Trust Fund to help Romania upgrade the engines on its Puma helicopters (IAR 330s) for deployment with ISAF. (Note: IAR Ghimbav, the firm that builds the Pumas, made similar upgrades for export to Saudi Arabia and UAE. End note)

BUCHAREST 00000188 002 OF 002

16. (C) Ghercioiu raised two other points. He said Romania was looking to grant access and expand the joint training program to other countries to use the facilities at Joint Task Force-East in Constanta. MND sees this as an opportunity to open up the prospects for building interoperability for non-NATO partners (e.g., Serbia; see Bucharest 00016 -- Romania is waiting for a reaction from the U.S. on this request.) He also asked whether the USG could send to Bucharest a joint-State-DOD team to discuss missile defense with MND and MFA officials. Romania is operating under the assumption the U.S. will continue plans to deploy a missile defense system in Central Europe, and would like to have an opportunity to hear about U.S. planning directly, and to explore ways to coordinate Romanian views on this issue.

17. (C) Comment: The MND is reassessing its programs and operations due to an approximately thirty-five percent cut in the 2009 budget (and the possibility of further cuts during a budget rectification exercise later this year). Priorities include fulfillment of Romania's international obligations in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo. However, Romania has reached the limits of its manpower, financial and logistical abilities to deploy and maintain its 1,600 military forces overseas without the infusion of substantially more resources. Romania's military is now faced with the daunting task of deciding what additional cuts can be made so the MND can continue to meet its current operational requirements, without incurring a drop in training and deployment schedules. Among the six strategic procurement priorities established in 2008 under the Tariceanu government, major purchases that would have contributed directly to the modernization and transformation of the Romanian military will have to be either delayed or cancelled altogether. (Note: these priorities include, inter alia: replacements for multi-role combat plane (MiG-21s), minesweepers, corvettes, 4x4 vehicles, ACVs, and UAVs.) Presidential election year politics--including PSD head Mircea Geoana's opposition to big-ticket military acquisitions--will also have an impact.

18. (C) Romania faces hard choices in these lean economic times. The GOR must decide soon on the minimal military requirements to match its security risk and threat assessment over the next few years (taking into account sufficient

lead-time for major weapon system procurements). The request for a Missile Defense Agency brief reflects the GOR's interest in determining how best to tie into either a U.S. or NATO-led missile defense network that would cover Romania. Losing its air combat competency would be a blow to a country that takes enormous pride in a long aviation history that includes the first jet-powered flights; a small--but lucky--contribution in World War II; and its contributions to NATO's Baltic air policing operations in 2007. End Comment.

¶9. (C) Request for guidance: Mission would appreciate Washington's guidance on a joint-State-DOD team to discuss Missile Defense with GOR officials. Mission would also appreciate guidance on proposal for allowing NATO and non-NATO Partners military training and exercise access to facilities associated with Joint Task Force-East. END RFG.
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